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SUBJECT: SHANGHAI RELIGIOUS CONTACTS DISCUSS NGOS, THEOLOGICAL
TRAINING, AND REGISTRATION ISSUES

REF: A) 2005 SHANGHAI 4524 B) 2006 BEIJING 15660

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During her February 26-27 visit to Shanghai, DRL/IRF Officer Emilie Kao explored ways to expand religious freedom in China with academics, officials from the Communist Party-approved China Christian Council/Three Self Patriotic Movement (CCC/TSPM), Shanghai YMCA leaders, a representative of Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC) who was actively involved in the company's Christian activities, and American citizens working in Shanghai with unregistered religious groups. Interlocutors believed religious groups could contribute to the building of "harmonious society" by providing social services for disadvantaged groups. However, there were government sensitivities about the appropriate role of religious groups and faith-based NGOs. There was a growing need for theological training for clergy and for religious education for lay volunteers who were taking on more responsibility for the running of CCC/TSPM churches. According to Fudan University academics, although, in theory, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) allows underground churches to register, in practice the CCC/TSPM prevented the registration of underground churches. As a result, few underground churches in East China bother to attempt to register. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During her February 26-27 visit to Shanghai, DRL/IRF Officer Emilie Kao met with some of Fudan University's most prominent religious experts, such as Fudan University Center for American Studies Professor Edward Xu, Fudan University School for Social Development and Public Policy Fan Lizhu, Fudan University School of Social Development and Public Policy Professor Pan Tianshu, and East China University of Politics and Law Professor Li Feng. Xu and Li were experts on the Protestant church in China, while Pan was an expert on faith-based charities. Fan was an expert on folk religions in China. Kao also visited the CCC/TSPM headquarters and met with Tian Feng Magazine (the official magazine of the CCC/TSPM) Chief Editor Mei Kangjun, Research Department Director Kan Baoping, Publication Department Director Xu Xiaohong, Training Department Director Bao Jinyuan and Social Service Department Staffer Xiao Yunxiao. Kao met with YMCA General Secretary Wu Jianrong at the Shanghai YMCA Luoshan Community Center and SMIC CEO Richard

Chang's Executive Assistant Beverly Liu at SMIC facilities to gain insight on how faith-based organizations operate in Shanghai. Kao also met with leaders of the International Church (an expatriate protestant church in Shanghai), Director of the Shanghai Community Center (an expatriate association) Nathan Showalter and Kim Bennett, an Amcit who also has extensive contacts with underground churches in Shanghai and trains their pastors.

Faith-Based Charities Moving Cautiously

13. (C) Kao's interlocutors believed that religious groups could play an important role in promoting a "harmonious society" by providing social services to disadvantaged groups. The Fudan professors said that religious groups were becoming more active in providing social services. According to Professor Xu, there were already 1,500 charities in China, the majority of which were faith-based charities. These groups were fairly new in China and there was great government and academic interest in their role. Fudan would host a conference on faith-based charities in June to highlight the work of these organizations in addressing social issues.

14. (C) While the number of faith-based organizations was increasing, many of these organizations were moving cautiously because of government sensitivities. As the official Protestant Church of China, the CCC/TSPM appeared to be the most cautious. Its social services office, established in 2003, oversaw charities and other social programs at churches. CCC/TSPM representatives did not provide details on its programs, but noted that the CCC/TSPM was limited in what it could do. CCC/TSPM relied on the government for funding and did not receive funds from overseas. Since it was a religious organization, it was prohibited from implementing programs at

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schools. It also had to rely on volunteers to implement programs since its professional staff was limited. In contrast, the Amity Foundation, an independent NGO that had ties to the CCC/TSPM, but was not considered a religious organization, had the freedom to implement programs at schools. It also had a larger budget since it was able to receive money from overseas. Finally, Amity had the authority to hire experts to implement programs, and, therefore, could carry out more extensive programs.

15. (C) Some faith-based NGOs such as the YMCA have had to hide their religious ties in order to implement programs. (See Reftel A for information on Shanghai YMCA's history and programs.) There were no crosses or other religious paraphernalia on display at the Luoshan center and no religious texts at the center's library. Wu said that it took the Shanghai YMCA a long time to obtain the people's trust and he worried that if the organization became more open about its Christian roots, it could lose the trust of the people. According to Wu, the most challenging aspect of his job was finding funding for YMCA programs. The local government was reluctant to share scarce social and human resources with the YMCA. In addition, the YMCA did not have a close relationship with the CCC/TSPM since the CCC/TSPM was focused on its own social services program. The YMCA was also at a disadvantage because it was registered as a non-public Community Services Center rather than as a NGO or a member of the Shanghai Charities Federation. Therefore, it had to pay the same taxes as for-profit corporations and could not offer donors any tax benefits.

16. (C) Wu added that the government continued to be suspicious of NGOs in general. Promotion of the "harmonious society" concept should be beneficial to YMCA's activities in theory, but, in practice, the government was afraid of expanding the influence of the YMCA or other NGOs for fear of a "color revolution." Wu concluded that it would take time for society to understand the role of NGOs.

¶17. (C) Most faith-based organizations focus their programs on mainstream disadvantaged groups such as the elderly and children. There were few programs for more marginalized groups such as prostitutes, HIV/AIDs positive individuals, or intravenous drug users.

Better Theological Education Needed

¶18. (C) Interlocutors noted the need for better theological education for members of both the Patriotic and underground churches. According to CCC/TSPM's Bao, 16 million people attended TSPM churches at 55,000-60,000 officially sanctioned religious meeting places. However, the TSPM had only 4,800-5,000 Protestant pastors, most of whom were located in coastal areas. Because of the lack of clergy, lay volunteers were taking on greater responsibility for the running of churches. Lay persons could preach, but were not allowed to conduct baptisms or distribute Holy Communion. Bao, who has headed the CCC/TSPM's training department since its establishment in 2003, said the CCC/TSPM was now focused on improving theological education of lay leaders as well as for clergy. The CCC/TSPM supervised all religious training centers for clergy and lay people and provided the centers with Bibles and other theological texts. The number of these centers was growing and there was practically a center in every district. Bao was also looking into using the Internet to provide further training. Recently, the CCC/TSPM had published religious CDs, DVDs and tapes. It was also interested in putting some texts into the MP3 format.

¶19. (C) Fudan academics shared Bao's concerns about the quality of religious education in China. Xu said that there were only 17 Protestant divinity schools in all of China, and of these, only two were considered to be higher level education schools. According to Xu, national patriotic associations, like the TSPM, controlled theological education and set limits on the number of foreign teachers who could teach at the institutions. While the Catholic Seminary in Sheshan could invite up to 10 foreigners per year, Protestant divinity schools, in particular the ones in Sichuan and Nanjing, could only invite one or two people per year. The Sheshan Seminary was controlled by Shanghai Bishop Alyosious Jin Luxian, who used his significant influence to get

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permission to invite foreigners to teach at the seminary. Xu implied that it was difficult for Protestant seminaries to provide quality education because of the lack of foreign teachers who have had more theological-based teaching experience. According to the CCC/TSPM, a student must be nominated by a TSPM church in order to be admitted to one of the patriotic theological schools. According to Xu, however, members of unregistered churches could and were studying at state-sanctioned divinity schools.

¶10. (C) Xu also disagreed that the CCC/TSPM was fully supervising the training centers for volunteers. According to Xu, these centers were created and run by individual preachers. This was an example of the "gray" sector of religion. In China, there were "gray, black, and red" areas. Black represented illegal activity, while red activities were state sanctioned. Gray activities were those that were strictly not legal, but seemed to have the support of the government. Religion was developing quickly in China and people involved in religion had to be creative in meeting the needs of their congregants. Training centers for lay people were a part of this trend and were growing in popularity. (Comment: The fact that there were only three staff members in Bao's office indicates that the centers while under the CCC/TSPM, likely operate more independently. End Comment.)

¶11. (C) Amcit Kim Bennett said unregistered house churches were also in need of theological education for their pastors. Bennett, who conducted training for several house church

pastors, said that while many were well versed in the Bible itself, they lacked training in church doctrines and in the practical application of the Bible to life, such as in marriage and parenting.

Religious Registration: CCC/TSPM Still Holds A Veto

¶12. (C) According to Xu, the CCC/TSPM still held veto power over which Protestant churches could register. While the government nominally supported the registration of underground churches, the CCC/TSPM often opposed their registration. Xu opined that registration was not really that important to many underground churches and was not a good measurement of religious freedom in China. Many underground churches, such as the ones in Wenzhou, saw no benefit to registration. These churches believed that, if they registered, they would lose congregants who were opposed to government interference in religion. (Comment: While legally the registration process is controlled by the RAB, the CCC/TSPM apparently continues to play "gatekeeper" for Protestant churches, despite statements from SARA Director Ye Xiaowen that churches can register independently of the CCC/TSPM. (Ref B). End comment.)

SMIC: Money Paves the Way for Building A Church

¶13. (C) Kao visited the SMIC campus in the suburbs of Shanghai on February 27, where she met with SMIC CEO Richard Chang's Executive Assistant Beverly Liu. Liu explained that SMIC produced semi-conductor chips in facilities in Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, Chengdu and Wuhan, which provided employees with housing as well as churches and schools for their employees. The Beijing and Shanghai facilities both had churches nearby for SMIC employees. According to Liu, CEO Chang had a holistic business approach and was a devout Christian who openly discussed his faith. Christianity was an important part of the company's culture. Many SMIC employees were very religious and, while they did not proselytize, also did not hide their religion.

¶14. (C) SMIC built its Shanghai church in 2006 and donated it to the CCC/TSPM, which oversaw the church's services. The church had two buildings, the larger one held 700 people and the smaller one of which held 200 people. The church had services in both English and Chinese, which were open to the local population. A few blocks from the church was an independent religious book store. According to Liu, the store was opened by an overseas Chinese couple that had returned to Shanghai. The store did not appear to sell any Bibles, but had Chinese language editions of Christian self-help books. Liu said that most of the books were printed by "Focus on the Family", a U.S.

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NGO, which contracted out to a factory in China. Liu said that relations with the Chinese government were very good since SMIC brought many benefits to local communities. The company has invested approximately 5 billion USD in China, two-thirds of it in Shanghai. It had also brought a great deal of high technology to China. In addition, SMIC hired a wide range of employees from low-skill laborers to engineers. According to Liu, SMIC had no problems with local governments and some were practically "throwing churches" at SMIC to attract the company.

COMMENT: Working with the "Gatekeepers"

¶15. (C) The CCC/TSPM continues to play a strong role in the registration of churches and in the success of "independent" faith-based groups, like Amity. However, the CCC/TSPM is not all powerful and needs funds and personnel to reach its own goals of improving education for clergy, training for lay leaders, and increasing its provision of social services. The

example of SMIC demonstrates that organizations that bring significant resources such as jobs, technology, or investment; and who are willing to work with local authorities may find space for growth of religious activities. Future attempts by the USG to engage the Central Government on legalizing the activities of unregistered religious groups should take into account the role of the patriotic associations such as the CCC/TSPM. End Comment.

¶16. (U) This report was coordinated with DRL/IRF Kao.
JARRETT